

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 INR-07 ISO-00 SS-15 SP-02 EB-07 L-03 IO-13

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R 060900Z JAN 77

FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5793

INFO AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 KUALA LUMPUR 0145

STADIS////////////////////////////////

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, MY, US

SUBJECT: REPORTED MFA ATTITUDES TOWARDS USG

REF; A. 76 STATE 305536 DEC B. 76 KL 7105 DEC

C. 76 KL 7278 DEC D. 76 KL 7486 DEC

1. SUMMARY: ALTHOUGH WE HAVE REFERRED IN MORE THAN ONE RECENT MESSAGE TO "FOOT-DRAGGING" OR "HARD-LINE" IN MFA, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THERE IS ANYTHING NEW IN GOM ATTITUDE TOWARDS US. GOM REMAINS COMMITTED TO POLICY OF EQUIDISTANCE FROM MAJOR POWERS; CONCENTRATION OF ENERGIES OF BUSY OFFICIALS ON PROBLEMS CLOSER TO HOME LEADS TO AN ATTITUDE LARGELY OF INDIFFERENCE TOWARDS US. THERE MAY ALSO BE RESIDUE OF DISLIKE FOR EUROPEAN FACES STEMMING FROM COLONIAL EXPERIENCE. THERE IS CERTAINLY TENDENCY TO SEE OUTSIDE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, EVEN THAT SOUGHT AND CONTRACTED FOR LIKE BUREC TEAM AS MERELY THEIR DUE. OTHER EMBASSIES WITH GREATER CLAIM ON INTIMACY FIND SIMILAR FRUSTRATIONS, E.G. AUSTRALIANS, AND JAPANESE (HONORARY EUROPEANS IN MALAYSIA).
END SUMMARY.

2. WE MAY HAVE MISLED YOU IN SOME OF OUR RECENT REPORTING.

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WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THERE IS ANYTHING NEW IN GOM ATTITUDE TOWARDS US. AS THE DEPARTMENT CORRECTLY OBSERVES IN REFTEL A, THE GOM AND ABOVE ALL THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS ARE DETERMINED TO PRESERVE A POLICY OF EQUIDISTANCE FROM THE MAJOR POWERS, AND ARE QUITE SATISFIED (AS ARE WE) WITH A "CORRECT" BUT NOT INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH US. IN A SMALL, AND IN MANY RESPECTS, OVERWORKED MINISTRY LIKE MFA THIS LEADS

TO AN ATTITUDE LARGELY OF INDIFFERENCE TOWARDS THE US BY BUSY OFFICIALS WHO ARE FOCUSING ON CONCERNS CLOSER TO HOME. (AS NOTED IN REFTEL D, THERE ARE ONLY THREE OFFICERS WHO WORK ON EUROPE AND AMERICA, WHILE FOURTEEN WORK ON SOUTHEAST ASIA AND ASEAN.) WE ALSO BELIEVE THAT AMONG SOME OF THESE OFFICIALS THERE MAY BE A RESIDUE OF DISLIKE OF EUROPEAN FACES STEMMING FROM THE COLONIAL EXPERIENCE AND THE PATRONIZING ATTITUDES OF THE BRITISH THAT HAVE LINGERED LONG AFTER INDEPENDENCE. WE HAVE HEARD FROM ONE OF HIS SUBORDINATES THAT THIS IS TRUE OF MFA'S SYG ZAKARIA, A POPULAR MAN WITH HIS YOUNGER SUBORDINATES, AND THAT ZAKARIA TAKES A FAIRLY HARD LINE WITHIN THE GOM ON THIRD WORLD AND UN ISSUES. THIS NATURALLY BRINGS US INTO OCCASIONAL CONFLICT BECAUSE MUCH OF OUR BUSINESS WITH MFA CONSISTS OF TRYING TO GET THEM TO MODIFY THEIR STAND ON ISSUES, E.G., ISRAEL, WHERE THEY SIMPLY DISAGREE WITH US. IN PERSONAL DEALINGS WE FIND ZAKARIA TO BE CHARMING, INTELLIGENT BUT BLAND. WE DO NOT SENSE ANY ACTIVE HOSTILITY, BUT OFTEN SEE A SKILLFULLY CONDUCTED PASSIVE RESISTANCE TO OUR EFFORTS. IT IS ALSO WORTH NOTING THAT THE OFFICIAL NOW IN CHARGE OF UN AFFAIRS FELT PERSONALLY INSULTED BY FORMER AMBASSADOR MOYNIHAN DURING HIS RECENT ASSIGNMENT TO THE UN.

3. WE REPORTED (REFTEL B) THAT MFA SEEMED INDIFFERENT AS TO HOW OUR NEGOTIATIONS ON THE BUREC TEAM TURNED OUT. TO PUT THIS IN CONTEXT WE WOULD HAVE TO RECALL THAT SEVERAL MONTHS AGO, WHEN WE FIRST RAISED THE ISSUE, FORMER UNDERSECRETARY KHOR ENG HEE TRIED TO BE HELPFUL. WE WERE NEVER ABLE, HOWEVER, TO GET MFA TO AGREE THAT A MATTER OF IMPORTANT PRINCIPLE WAS INVOLVED. MFA SUBSEQUENTLY HANDED THE PROBLEM TO A JUNIOR CONFIDENTIAL

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OFFICER AND PERSISTED IN SEEING THE PROBLEM AS A DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN AN AGENCY OF THE USG AND A MALAYSIAN MINISTRY STEMMING FROM A POORLY DRAFTED AND AMBIGUOUS AGREEMENT. PART OF THIS ATTITUDE DERIVED FROM THE FACT THAT MFA HAD NO ROLE IN THE ORIGINAL AGREEMENT, AND FELT NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR IT. THIS MAY SEEM UNREASONABLE, BUT BUREAUCRATS ARE LIKE THAT.

4. ALTHOUGH SUCH PROGRESS AS WE HAVE MADE IN STRAIGHTENING OUT THE BUREC SITUATION STEMS DIRECTLY FROM OUR EVIDENT WILLINGNESS TO WITHDRAW THE TEAM, SOME GOM OFFICIALS INCLUDING POSSIBLY ZAKARIA, RESENT WHAT THEY FEEL WAS PRESSURE. WE BELIEVE THIS RESENTMENT WILL BE TRANSITORY AND ARE NOT OVERLY CONCERNED ABOUT IT.

5. AS WE HAVE NOTED IN OTHER CONTEXTS, MALAYSIA IS SOMEWHAT SPOILED IN THE AREA OF FOREIGN TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE. THE BROAD RANGE OF PROGRAMS CARRIED ON HERE UNDER BILATERAL PROGRAMS OR BY INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES IS CONSIDERED NOTHING

MORE THAN THEIR DUE. COLOMBO PLAN EXPERTS HAVE NO SPECIAL STATUS OR TAX PRIVILEGES. (ONE WAS TRIED RECENTLY FOR MURDERING HIS WIFE.) BUREC STATUS PROVIDED FOR IN THE AGREEMENT WAS THEREFORE SOMETHING OF AN ANOMALY, AND OUR INSISTANCE THAT THE TERMS OF THE AGREEMENT BE HONORED MAY HAVE BEEN SEEN BY SOME INUMFA AND TREASURY AS UNSEEMLY STIFFNESS IN THE BEHAVOIR OF WHAT IN THEIR EYES SHOULD BE AN INDULGENT DONOR. (AFTER ALL, WE HAVE ACCEPTED SIMILAR TREATMENT UNDER THE PEACE CORPS AGREEMENT.) MALAYSIA HAS, IN SORT, A TOUCH OF THE WARTY BLIGGENS SYNDROME. AS THE READER MAY RECALL, WARTY TOLD ARCHIE, "DON'T ASK WHAT I HAVE DONE TO DESERVE THE UNIVERSE; ASK WHAT THE UNIVERSE HAS DONE TO DESERVE ME."

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ACTION EA-09

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5794
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 KUALA LUMPUR 0145

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6. OTHER COUNTRIES APPEAR TO FACE A COMPARABLE SITUATION IN THEIR DEALINGS WITH MALAYSIA. THE AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER HAS TOLD US THAT HE IS UNHAPPY ABOUT THE LEVEL OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN HIS MISSION AND THE GOM. CONSIDERING THE SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP IN THE MILITARY FIELD AND THE LEVEL OF AUSTRALIAN ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE TO MALAYSIA, HE HAS FOUND THE FOREIGN OFFICE AND OTHER GOVERNMENT AGENCIES RELUCTANT TO VOLUNTEER INFORMATION OR CONSULT ON MATTERS WHICH HE FEELS ARE OF LEGITIMATE CONCERN TO THE GOA. THEY ARE NOT UNFRIENDLY, HE NOTED, BUT INDIFFERENT. IN AN INFORMAL LUNCHEON WITH JAPANESE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS ASIA BUREAU OFFICIALD DURING AMBASSADOR UNDERHILL'S CONSULTATION IN TOKYO LAST OCTOBER, THE HOSTS NOTED THAT IN THE GAIMUSHO THERE WERE THAI AND INDONESIAN "MAFIA"; OFFICERS WHO HAD SERVED IN JAKARTA AND BANGKOK WHO WERE REGARDED BY THEIR FELLOWS AS PARTISAN SUPPORTERS OF THE INTERESTS OF THE TWO SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES. THEY

NOTED THAT THERE WAS NO COUNTERPART GROUP FOR MALAYSIA.
A LIVELY DISCUSSION ENSUED AS TO WHY THIS WAS SO. ONE
EXPLANATION WAS
THAT MALAYSIA DID NOT HAVE A RICH INDIGENOUS CULTURE, AND WAS
STILL TRYING TO ESTABLISH A NATIONAL IDENTITY. THE FOREIGNER
HAD LITTLE TO IMMERSE HIMSELF IN AND BECOME ATTACHED TO.
PROBABLY EQUALLY IMPORTANT, MALAYSIA SINCE INDEPENDENCE HAS
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BEEN RICH ENOUGH, STABLE ENOUGH, WELL GOVERNED ENOUGH TO BE
MORE TRULY INDEPENDENT THAN MOST OF ITS NEIGHBORS. IT HAS NOT
REALLY NEEDED FOREIGN ASSISTANCE AND THEREFORE NOT HAD TO
DEVELOPED THE MANIPULATIVE WILES OF THE CLIENT STATE. THERE
HAS BEEN NO PRESSURE TO WOO OR CULTIVATE THE U.S. OR JAPAN,
AND THEREFORE MALAYSIA HAS NOT GENERATED AMONG JAPANESE (AND
AMERICANS) THE PARTISANSHIP THAT COMES FROM A FEELING OF BEING
NEEDED.

7. WE HAVE NEVER HAD ANY INDICATION THAT THE PETRONAS-EXXON

NEGOTIATIONS AFFECTED MFA ATTITUDES ONE WAY OR THE OTHER. IN
FACT, MOST OF US WERE A LITTLE SURPRISED BY THE LACK OF
INTEREST SHOWN BY MFA OFFICIALS IN THE NEGOTIATIONS.
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